

Agriculture and Farmlands

1. Q: Can existing agricultural uses be preserved and integrated with the new urban uses in the north and mid- Coyote?

A: The City Council Vision and Expected Outcomes directs the plan to include 50,000 industry-driving jobs and 25,000 housing units in an urban, pedestrian-friendly environment. Opportunities for agricultural uses are expected to be limited in the urban part of the specific plan and are likely to be more appropriate in the South Coyote Valley Greenbelt. The Initial Draft CVSP (posted on the front page of the CVSP website) includes a Greenbelt Strategy that was discussed at the Task Force in 2004. A draft of the Greenbelt Research Report and the Greenbelt Strategy are on our website (see Publications and Reports).

2. Q: Will agricultural uses be allowed to continue in the Greenbelt?

A: The San Jose 2020 General Plan Land Use/Transportation Diagram of Coyote Greenbelt is an overlay designation for that area proposed as a non-urban buffer between San Jose and Morgan Hill. Agriculture is the predominant base land use designation. Agriculture will continue to be encouraged in the South Coyote Valley Greenbelt area, and small-scale agriculture is recommended as part of the Greenbelt Strategy, which is a part of the Initial Draft CVSP. The General Plans of the County and San Jose are consistent in providing for the continuing use of the Greenbelt for agricultural uses. No uses or structures are allowed which would require urban services, such as sanitary sewer or urban street improvements.

3. Q: What is “sustainable agriculture” or “urban-edge farming”? *

A: As defined by Congress, sustainable agriculture is “an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- a. Satisfy human food and fiber needs;*
- b. Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends;*
- c. Make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;*
- d. Sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and*
- e. Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as whole.*

* Note: “Sustainable Agriculture” was addressed by Congress in the 1990 “Farm Bill” (Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990), Public Law 101-624, and Title XVI, Subtitle A, section 1603.

4. Q: How does the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) address agricultural land?

A: CEQA encourages agencies to make wise and efficient land use decisions by adopting and using criteria to implement the federal Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1993. CEQA defines “agricultural land” as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, or unique farmland, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture land inventory and monitoring criteria as modified for California. In determining whether physical impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, the City’s EIR for the CVSP will assess: (a) if “agricultural land” is proposed for conversion to non-agricultural use, (b) if the project would conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act Contract, or (c) whether the plan will involve other changes in the existing environment which could result in conversion of “agricultural land” to non-agricultural use. (Also see Draft EIR on the front page of our website.)

5. Q: Are there any alternatives to acquiring land in fee title for agricultural use?

A: Other alternatives include conservation agricultural easements and regulatory mechanisms. These mechanisms will continue to be refined during the Specific Plan process.